



The Hours

An elegy to FSF by JPB

At 3 o'clock in the morning cures don't work—
and in a real dark night of the self it is always
3 o'clock in the morning, day after day.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*

I

All day, knowing you checked-out,
I have sat in this long-windowed room,
Looking upon the sea and, dismayed
By mortal sadness, thought without thought to resume
Those hours which you and I have known—
Hours when youth like an insurgent sun
Showered ambition on an aimless air,
Hours foreboding disillusion,
Hours which now there is none to share.
Since you are gone, I live them all alone.

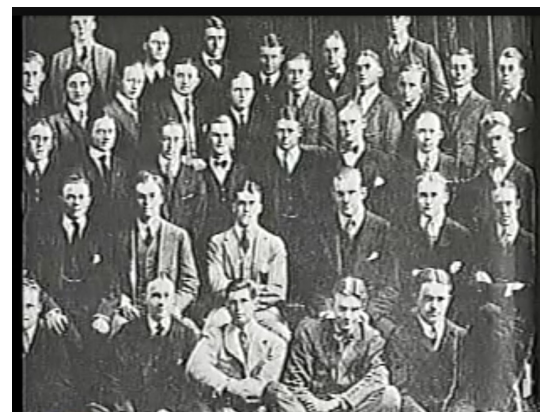
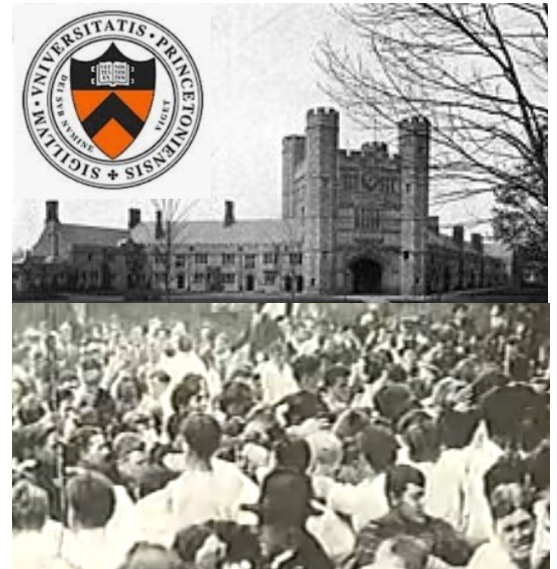
II

A day like any day. Though any day now
We expect nirvana. The sky is overcast,
And shuddering cold as snow the shoreward blast.
And in the marsh, like a sea astray, now
Waters brim. This is the moment when the sea
Being most full of motion seems motionless.
Land and sea are merged. The marsh is gone. And my distress
Is at the flood. All but the dunes are drowned.
And brimming with memory I have found
All hours we ever knew, but have not found
The key. I cannot find the lost key
To the magic closet you as a wild child hid.

III

I think of all you did
And all you might have done, before undone
By the crack-up, the undoing of despair.
No promise such as yours when like the spring
You came, colors of jonquils in your hair,
Inspired as the wind, when woods are bare
And every silence is about to sing.

None had such promise then, and none
Your scathing wit or your disarming grace;
For you were bold as was Danae's son,
Conceived like Perseus in a dream of gold.
And there was none when you were young, not one,



So prompt in the reflecting shield to trace
The glittering aspect of a Gorgon age.

Despair no love, no fortune could assuage...
Was it a fault in your disastrous blood
That beat from no fortunate god,
The failure of all passion in mid-course?
You shrank from nothing as from solitude,
Lacking the still assurance, and pursued
Beyond the sad excitement by remorse.

Was it that having shaped your stare upon
The severed head of time, upheld and blind,
Upheld by the stained hair,
And seen the blood upon that sightless stare,
You looked and were made one
With the strained horror of those sightless eyes?
You looked, and were not turned to stone.

IV

You have outlasted the nocturnal terror,
The head hanging in the hanging mirror,
The hour haunted by a harrowing face.

Now you are comfortably numb at last. And that disgrace
You wrought in countless dives we don't see.
Instead devolution of your legacy.

V

I have lived with you the hour of your humiliation.
I have seen you turn upon the others in the night
And of sad self-loathing
Concealing nothing
Heard you cry: 'I am screwed. But you are vegetating!'
And you had that right.
The beautiful and damned do not so own to their damnation.

I have lived with you some hours of the night,
The late hour
When the lights lower,
The later hour
When the lights go out,
Dissipation is past.

Hour of the outcast and the outworn whore,
That is past three and not yet four—

When the grim reaper waits beyond the door

THE CRACK-UP

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

With other Uncollected Pieces,
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Together with Letters to Fitzgerald from Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton, T. S. Eliot, Thomas Wolfe and John Dos Passos

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Edited by



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And from the gutter with unpitying hands
Demands the same sad guiltiness as before,

The hour of utter destitution
When the self knows the horror of its loss
And knows the world too poor
For restitution,

Past three o'clock
And not yet four—
When not pity, pride,
Or being brave,
Thinking good fortune, friends that rave,
Or of drug avails, for all has been tried,
And nothing avails to save
The self from recognition of its slide.

The hour of self-judgement is always four o'clock.
It is always four o'clock for the stiff upper-lipped.

VI

Having heard the lonely word that you had skipped,
All day I have lingered in this lofty room,
Locked in the light of sea and gloom,
And thought, at cost of sea-hours, to illumine
The hours that you and I have known,
Hours our parting does not condemn, nor love condone.

And I have seen the sea-light set the tide
In salt succession toward the sullen shore
And waves lost on the losing sand
Seen shores receding and the sands succumb.

Crabs scurry, glimmering shores erode,
Pounding waves on dunes and road.
Drowned confines to the disputed kingdom—
Desolate mastery, since the dark has come.

Yes, the dark has come. I cannot shelter your bays,
For here the bays are exposed. For fugitive
As surpassed fame, the leaves this sea-wind frays.
Why should I promise what I cannot give?

For I cannot restore Jimmy Gatz
Or resurrect Jay Gatsby
(So that you can write,
"I want to be extravagantly admired again!"
Dark, dark. But the shore here has habitual light.

TO: John Peale Bishop
April 1925

ALS, 5 pp. Princeton University

American Express Co.
Rome, Italy.

Dear John:

Your letter was perfect. It told us everything we wanted to know and the same day I read your article (very nice too) in Van. Fair about cherching the past. But you disappointed me with the quality of some of it (the news)—for instance that Bunnys play failed, that Townsend has got the swelled-head and that you + Margaret find life dull and depressing there. We want to come back but we want to come back with money saved and so far we havn't saved any—tho I'm one novel ahead and book of pretty good (seven) short stories. I've done about 10 pieces of horrible junk in the last year tho that I can never republish or bear to look at—cheap and without the spontaneity of my first work. But the novel Im sure of. Its marvellous

We're just back from Capri where I sat up (tell Bunny) half the night talking to my old idol Compton Mackenzie. Perhaps you met him. I found him cordial, attractive and pleasantly mundane. You get no sense from him that feels his work has gone to pieces. He's not pompous about his present output. I think he's just tired. The war wrecked him as it did Wells and many of that generation.

To show how well you guessed the gossip I wanted we were wondering King at the same time once in those palmy days.

The cheerfulest things in my life are first Zelda and second the hope that my book has something extrardinary about it. I want to be extravagantly admired again. Zelda and I sometimes indulge in terrible four day rows that always start with a drinking party but we're still enormously in love and about the only truly happily married people I know.

Our Very Best To Margaret
Please Write!
Scott

Fitz! I leave you to your eternal night!

..

John Peale Bishop ('1892-'1944) Princeton '17 trio with F. Scott Fitzgerald ('1896-'1940) & Edmund Wilson ('1895-'1972), editor of the Nassau Literary Magazine, 2 years army WWI, model for poet Thomas Parke D'Invilliers - The Great Gatsby opening epigraph. {son JPB Jr. '1927-'2010, PhD Harvard '1956, Prof at Cornell, "In Time" '1999}

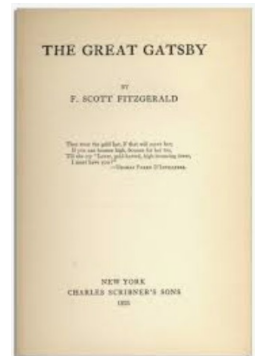
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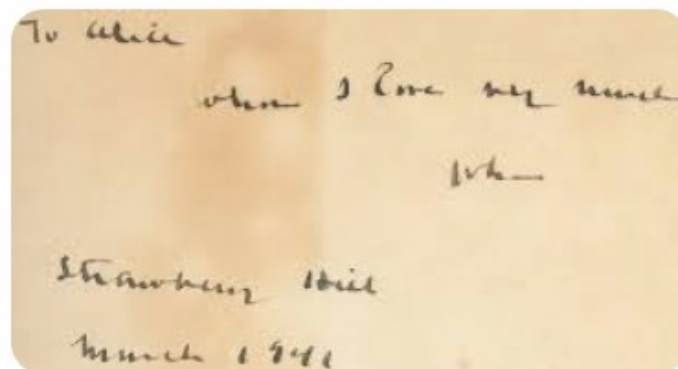
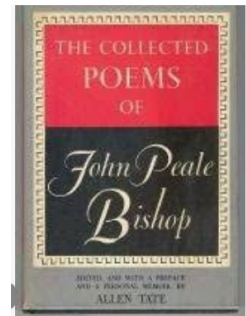
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cf. <https://lithub.com/read-ezra-pounds-extensive-revisions-to-t-s-eliot-the-waste-land>

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JOHN PEALE BISHOP



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